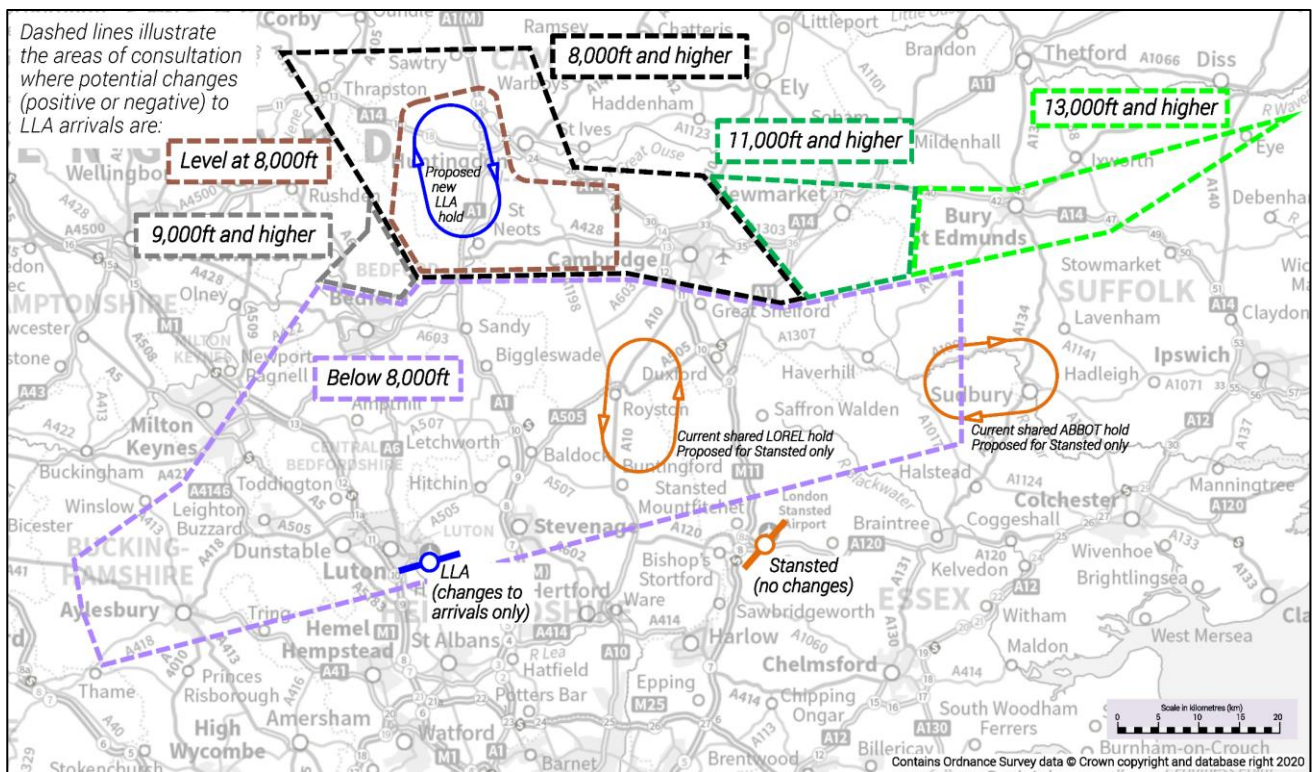


1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This consultation is about a proposed change to the flightpaths of aircraft arriving at London Luton Airport (LLA).
- 1.2 It is sponsored jointly by NATS and LLA. NATS provides air traffic services at the airport itself and for the wider air route network across the country and LLA is responsible for the lower level arrival routes.
- 1.3 Air traffic control in the London region is complex, especially for aircraft arriving at LLA and London Stansted Airport because they are geographically close to each other. The current airspace design has been fundamentally unchanged in decades, since before the low-fare carrier expansion at both airports and their associated subsequent growth. It forces LLA and Stansted, which are two of the five busiest airports in the UK, to share the same arrival flows, in a relatively small region north of London (if combined, the figures for LLA and Stansted would make it the second busiest in the UK).
- 1.4 The more complex the airspace, the greater the need for the airborne holding of arrivals when it gets busy, delaying and disrupting the travelling public.
- 1.5 Controllers take each aircraft from the shared flows towards the destination airport, descending them safely to their respective runways. This can be an intense task and is unique in the UK; arrival flows to most busy airports are separated, by airspace design, higher and further away.
- 1.6 LLA's and Stansted's arrival flows are shared until aircraft descend through c.8,000ft (around 25 miles from the airport), which is comparatively close and leaves little room for controllers to operate. Any arrival delay or disruption at one airport causes unnecessary arrival delay to the other, because the flows are so closely shared.
- 1.7 During periods where the workload of our air traffic controllers is predicted to become too intense, safety dictates that we apply temporary limits (known as flow restrictions) to the numbers of aircraft that a controller can manage, before safe limits are exceeded. This causes delay to the travelling public (at both LLA and Stansted), and is a short-term, temporary solution to the underlying problem.
- 1.8 We have identified that, unless we do something now, the intensity of air traffic control workload may become unsustainable for air traffic controllers in the longer term. This would make arrival delays and airborne holding more common, creating increased environmental impacts - including the aviation fuel burnt and greenhouse gases, such as CO₂.
- 1.9 The amount of air traffic has been impacted by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, but the need to change the design of this airspace remains. We must ensure it is fit for purpose when traffic recovers to pre-pandemic levels, and we must allow for future growth.
- 1.10 We propose to reduce this complexity by moving LLA's arrival flightpaths, leaving Stansted's arrival flows unchanged. This would reduce air traffic controller workload because the arrival flows to each airport would be separated further out and higher up, assuring a safe and efficient operation for the future.
- 1.11 We are not proposing any change to the way aircraft depart from LLA, nor would there be changes to the way Stansted arrivals and departures fly under this proposal.
- 1.12 Within this consultation we have described the impacts of no-change, and two options for airspace change to address the complexity issue.
- 1.13 The **first option** seeks to establish a new airborne hold, or stack, for LLA arrivals, with associated airspace and air routes, above approximately 8,000ft. From that new hold, the method air traffic controllers use to bring arrivals from 8,000ft to the runway would be similar to today – providing each aircraft with heading, descent and speed instructions, manually managing each flight (known as vectoring). This reduces complexity and minimises the change from today's flightpaths at lower altitudes.
- 1.14 The **second option** also seeks to establish a new airborne hold, or stack, for LLA arrivals, with associated airspace and air routes, at 8,000ft and above. From that new hold, air traffic controllers would still use the vectoring method described in the first option, to descend aircraft to the runway. However, there would also be a number of predetermined arrival flightpaths which aircraft could fly automatically and

without intervention by controllers. These predetermined arrival flightpaths would reduce air traffic complexity even more than the first option, making this our preferred option.

1.15 The areas for consultation are shown below:



- 1.16 If we were to do nothing, the current situation can be managed safely in the short term, however this would not be sustainable once traffic grows beyond pre-pandemic levels. There is the potential for a reduction in safety as a result of increased arrival delay if we were to do nothing. We must be prepared for those levels of traffic, and airspace changes such as this take time to progress.
- 1.17 We have described the no-change option solely as a baseline for comparison, between the proposed options and what happens today, so that you can determine if you will experience any change.
- 1.18 Consultation is an essential part of the airspace change process. It allows us to explain our proposal in a fair, transparent and effective way, and gather information to understand views about the impact of the options presented. It allows stakeholders to provide relevant and timely feedback to us, which we can then use to inform our final proposal.
- 1.19 This consultation started at 0001 Monday 19th October 2020 and closes at 2359 Friday 5th February 2021, a period of 15 weeks and 5 days.
- 1.20 We expect to submit a formal Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in June 2021.
- 1.21 If approved by the CAA (the regulator), we plan to implement the change no earlier than February 2022.